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CHAPTER IV

HUSBAND AND WIFE IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY

The General and the Particular in the Pattern of Domestic Relations

611 IT is clear from Chapter II that *dɔɣam*, the fact of birth, the event that fixes one's descent immutably, takes precedence over all other conditions governing the social relations and the social roles of a Talɔŋ. This principle comes out in all departments of Tale social life, and nowhere so plainly as in the organization of domestic life. We turn, therefore, to examine the working of kinship in the domestic family, which we have called the focal field of kinship.

593 It is important to bear in mind that kinship relations in the family group are inter-articulated in a single configuration, dominated by the *patria potestas* of the male head of the family. The relations of father and child are coloured by the relations of mother and child that coexist with them, and the relations of mother and child acquire a special accent in the context of the relations between co-wives. Particular domestic relationships appear in their true light only when they are considered as part of the total pattern. The polarity of *dug* and *yir* moulds them all; all play a part in the balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces in the structure of the family. All, moreover, are subject to the pull and pressure of genealogical connexions and groupings outside the family circle.

593 606 The natives are very conscious of this, and take it into account in the management of their lives. They say, for instance, that a woman's parents continue to have great influence over her for some years after her marriage and that is why her husband must keep on the good side of his parents-in-law. 'Don't you know what in-lawship means?' said Bayankura, somewhat lugubriously, when I found him hard at work helping to rebuild his father-in-law's homestead. Again, Tiezien's family believed that he was much under the influence of his senior wife, Tanzoo. So when by various pretexts he caused both of his late brother's sons to lose the young wives they had recently taken, they ascribed it morosely to Tanzoo's jealousy of their mother, Tiezien's second wife.

181 We shall not attempt a full-dress study of Tale family life; here we are concerned only with the structurally significant norms. In a society as homogeneous and economically undifferentiated as that of the Tallensi, people of the same sex, age, and social standing tend to have the same life history; and organized units such as the lineage and the family tend to have a stereotyped structure and development. The common denominators of action stand out.

858 156 Yet it is a constantly reiterated assumption of the natives that no two

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people are absolutely alike. Peculiarities of personality and character, they say (and observation bears them out), qualify all social relationships. People conform to the norms but each in the light of his own experiences, his special circumstances, his personal idiosyncrasies. The same sort of events, the same kind of person-to-person relations, make up the life of every family; but they are combined in a unique way in the history of a particular family. They give a distinctive tone or atmosphere to the life of that family that can be more easily felt than described. I knew intimately six domestic families which I kept under observation for many months; I knew another dozen or so families fairly well, and spent many hours in yet other homes all over Taleland. I learnt to perceive, but I could never get below the surface of this affective ambient of family life. It is, indeed, difficult to find terms with which to convey the impression of smooth, equable, well-balanced running which a family like that of Ɔmara's makes on an observer, or the contrary impression of strain, or of inadequate co-ordination, which one sees in families like those of Kutɔbis of Tɔŋ-Dekpieng, or of Pumaan of Tɔŋ-Puhug.

Most Tale families seem to go on in a stable and harmonious way; but there are, as we shall see, very many possibilities of friction, some inevitable, some avoidable, which arise out of the cleavages inherent in the structure of the family. How long these forces of dissension remain dormant, or how they are handled when they thrust forward, depends very much on the character of the family head. A tactful and considerate family head like Ɔmara manages to keep a smooth discipline in his family and to maintain amicable relations with his neighbours, whereas an erratic man like Kutɔbis cannot keep his sons in check and is for ever at loggerheads with his nearest agnates. From the point of view of the structurally significant norms, this feature of Tale family life and of Tale kinship in general is important as underlying the elasticity of actual social behaviour within the limits of the norms, and as a dynamic factor in the cycle of changes that a family passes through.

One thing which puts a screen between an inquirer and the inner life of a family is the surprising degree of privacy a family can preserve. It is surprising in the circumstances of Tale social life. One's neighbours are one's nearest lineage kin. The lineage principle compels a man to consult and gain the support of these kin in any matter of importance, and he generally does so in trivial matters too. Men of the same lineage grow up together, play together in childhood, often work together as youths or men, constantly visit one another's homes, identify themselves with one another and act together in corporate affairs. Inevitably they know one another's personal history in detail. And this knowledge is not the mere stuff of gossip, but a real force in the corporate life of the lineage and the community, since the biography of the individual is a thread in the current history of the lineage, tying up with its common

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compared with its neighbours, in respect to those components of its culture connected with its craft. Only sons of that lineage may be taught the craft of the smith; and even those who through lack of inclination or ability do not learn it share the ideology associated with it and submit to ritual and moral constraints in virtue of this. Because of their traditional craft the men of Sakpee do not eat the hedgehog until they have successfully made a piece of ironwork; and when they were driven from the Tong Hills, abandoned their homes and property but carried with them the sacred anvils. Similarly, the social sphere of the Hill Tallis contrasts in many respects with that of their Namoo neighbours on account of their different ritual systems.

Yet it is necessary to note that these differences do not detract from the essential homogeneity of the social sphere for all the Tallensi. They are differences in the substance of some cultural definitions, not in the forms and functions of institutions. The totemic taboos of the Hill Tallis are exactly paralleled by the prohibitions of first-born children eating the domestic fowl among the Namoos. What their sacred groves and initiation rites mean to the former, their first ancestor, sacred drums, and the chiefship mean to the latter. The psychological substratum of social behaviour is the same in both groups and in their associated clans, with a sole exception. The initiation cult of the Hill Tallis does give a bias to their ideology and so to their social sphere which the Namoos lack.[1] In our present inquiry these differences may be neglected since the dynamic relationships of the individual to his community are the same everywhere in Taleland. Whether a child is trained as a blacksmith or as a farmer, and whether he is inducted into the ritual and ideology of the ancestor cult alone, or into that of the sacred groves as well, the principles are the same.

This background will be continuously discerned in our study of Tale education. But a few clinching observations may be cited here to show that the child is not merely a supernumerary element of his society but thinks and feels himself to be a part of it.

1. I was walking with Samane and his two small sons (8–9 years)[2]

[1] See M. Fortes, 'Ritual Festivals and Social Cohesion in the Hinterland of the Gold Coast', *American Anthropologist*, vol. xxxviii, no. 4.

[2] All ages are estimated, but the probable error of such an estimate is at least 12 months.